CBS NEWS
A Division of Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.
524 West 57 Street
New York, New York 10019
(212) 765-4321

Dear Mr. Premier:

The attempt by Americans to understand China and the Chinese people is late by at least one hundred years.

In writing this letter directly to you, it is my sincere hope and desire that an attempt at true understanding does not wait another hundred years, or even one year. I have sought to indicate this in my cables of May 14 and June 21, 1971 to the Foreign Office of the People's Republic of China with copies to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Ottawa, Canada and to Professor Paul Lin, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

I have devoted much of the past 15 years to the study of China and America, beginning with two years of graduate study in the East Asian Institute at Harvard University, 1957-59, where Chinese history and culture were my primary fields of study.

For the past 10 years I have been a producer and writer of news and documentary films for the news division of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS NEWS). The documentary unit in which I work has produced television broadcasts on the Japanese, the Italians, the French, on South Africa from the viewpoint of black South Africans and on such subjects as the "Selling of the Pentagon," "Hunger in America" and "Health in America," among others.

In 1962, I was privileged to produce a broadcast with Edgar Snow shortly after the publication of his book, "The Other Side of the River." Mr. Snow said at that time the film portion of the program which I prepared to accompany an interview with him was the best about China he had seen.

For more than five years I have sought to develop a television broadcast that would improve communication and understanding between the people of China and the people of the United States. I discussed this with Professor Lin in Montreal on April 1st, before I was aware of the new possibilities created by the invitation of the American table tennis team to visit the People's Republic.

During the past several months I have had many long conversations with Americans deeply concerned with American policies in Asia and with American understanding of the People's Republic of China. I have received considerable help from members of the Committee for Concerned Asian Scholars and from members of the Bay Area Institute in this country.

It is clear that the most important broadcast to be done at this time is a long, thoughtful examination of American attitudes towards China and the Chinese people. What is needed is a new and truer perspective from which the American people can view and understand the Chinese people and the relationships, past and present, between China and the United States. I suggest this can only be done in a one or two hour broadcast, prepared by younger persons unencumbered by attitudes of the past. This is the broadcast I have proposed and which I have been authorized to do by CBS NEWS.

There is a way to present this broadcast that is new and effective. Studies by scholars in America show that Americans have gotten most of their information and impressions about China and the Chinese people from films. These films, mostly fictional and superficial, have formed for Americans their earliest and most lasting notions of the Chinese. During the past two months I have looked at more than 200,000 feet of film and other visual material about China and the Chinese people that has been produced or seen in this country, dating from the first film by Thomas Edison made in 1896. These have included dramatic films, documentaries, newsreels, travelogues, historical and propaganda films. They have been seen throughout the years in theaters, schools, on television and in meetings of private groups. Working with me as a consultant is Mrs. Dorothy B. Jones who has made a study of China as portrayed in American films from 1896-1955 and who is now an executive officer of Another Mother for Peace.

These films are important in many ways. There have been a great number of them. They have been seen by millions of Americans over several generations. They have been the source for much of what Americans believe about China and the people of China. They have been responsible for images, stereotypes, and assumptions held by the American people about China and the Chinese people. These images often bear no relation to reality and serve to create and perpetuate distorted ideas and misconceptions about Asia in general and about China in particular. Especially in the past 22 years, in the absence of real and direct contact between the peoples of China and America, the American people's understanding of issues and public policies has been related to and misled by these images and attitudes.

It is my purpose to bring to the American people a realization of those false ideas which are held about China and the Chinese people. The same films and commentary that have been the source for so much confusion and misunderstanding can be used, analytically and historically, to correct our perceptions and create a new awareness.

To accomplish this, the subject must be examined in three ways:

1. how Americans view China and the Chinese people, including the experience of Chinese living in the United States;

2. how Americans have seen themselves in relation to China and the Chinese people;

3. how the Chinese view the American people and the United States, both historically and today.

It is essential, therefore, that we not only reveal and examine the images and ideas that Americans have of the Chinese people but also that we relate them to the reality of the People's Republic of China. It is necessary that we know and understand the attitudes and ideas of the Chinese people and of the leadership of the People's Republic of China. It is necessary that the American people understand the meaning of the thought of Mao Tse-tung, its achievements and what it offers the world. It is necessary for the American people to understand what makes the People's Republic of China different from other socialist countries. And, it is necessary for the American people to understand the meaning of the United States' presence in China historically, in order to appreciate the attitudes and aspirations of the Chinese people today.

If it is possible to visit the People's Republic of China at this time, I would hope to bring with me a camera team of three or four persons. The choice of cameraman, soundman, and assistants would be made from employees of CBS NEWS of long standing who have had years of experience in the technology of films. I would seek your guidance and consultation in the final determination of what specifically can and should be filmed and recorded. It is my additional hope that you would personally consent to an interview concerning the questions raised by the subject of the broadcast.

Finally, in helping the American people understand the views and historical perspective of the people of China, I respectfully offer the following possibilities for your consideration.

1. that certain films in the Peking film archives may be available for use in this broadcast.

2. that one or more journalists of the People's Republic of China come to the United States to make and narrate a film about America to be shown to the American people, either as part of this broadcast or as a separate broadcast. CBS NEWS would assume all costs and provide all the equipment and facilities necessary for such a film. The film itself, at an agreed upon length, would be broadcast as edited by the journalists of the People's Republic. This would be an innovative and positive step towards the mutual exchange of ideas and understanding between the Chinese people and the American people.

CBS NEWS documentaries are seen by as many as 50-million people in this country and millions more overseas. In addition, they are used as educational films in schools and by private groups of citizens for years after they are originally broadcast. This is the time, a unique opportunity, for the American people to re-examine old attitudes and old ideas about the Chinese people and of the People's Republic of China. It is for this purpose that I make this request for visas to visit the People's Republic of China. I am convinced that the program we will broadcast this year will contribute as no other presentation can to erasing misconceptions and to developing greater understanding between the peoples of China and America. Its impact and contribution would be the greater for having been able to report directly from the People's Republic of China to the people of the United States.

What has not been accomplished in one hundred years probably cannot be achieved in a single television broadcast. But it is a beginning, a first step that must be taken if the common interests of the people of China and the people of America are to be served.

It is with that in mind that I respectfully request your consideration of this project.

Sincerely,

Irving E. Drasnin

Irving E. Drasnin
Producer, CBS NEWS
35 West 45th Street
New York, New York 10036

Premier Chou En-lai
People's Republic of China
Peking
People's Republic of China

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